Show-of-Presence Aircraft to Secure Afghan Elections:

Planning and Assessing Them

One of the first questions asked about the October 2004 Afghan presidential elections was, "Did the use of aircraft in the 'Show-of-Presence'[1] role work?" Specifically, "Did air presence achieve the Combined Joint Task Force 76's (CJTF-76's) air support goals for the presidential election security plan?" Members of the US Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne) (USASETAF ABN) posed these questions in March 2005 as the incoming CJTF-76 staff at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, during the relief-in-place of the 25th Infantry Division (Light) (25th ID).

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From the 25th ID Joint Fires Element (JFE), the USASETAF ABN Joint Fires and Effects Cell (JFEC) learned that the only way to answer these questions was to describe what did *not* happen: an election marred by anti-coalition militia violence or low voter turn-out. Because of this, Afghanistan's first democratic election since the fall of the Taliban was a resounding success.

In September 2005, the Afghan government held its second democratic election. The nationwide vote gave the Afghan people the opportunity to elect a national assembly and provincial council members. CJTF-76, again, used aircraft in the show-of-presence role as part of the election security plan, and from a security standpoint, the election again was a success.

This article describes the role of aircraft conducting show-of-presence missions to facilitate security for the national assembly and provincial council election

and how to plan and assess the effectiveness of such missions. It follows up on Captain Joseph A. Katz's article "Afghanistan—The Role of 'Show of Presence' Aircraft in the First Democratic Elections" that appeared in the January-February 2005 edition.

Air Support Tasks. As Captain Katz states in his article, the 25th ID air support goals during the October 2004 Afghan presidential election were to provide security to Coalition Forces, instill a sense of instability and insecurity in the anti-coalition militia trying to disrupt the elections and provide a sense of security for the Afghan people as they took part in the election.

For the September 2005 national assembly and provincial council election, USASETAF ABN accepted the same logic but further delineated these goals into air support tasks to achieve the election's desired effects. Figure 1 shows these effects and the air support tasks required to achieve the effects.

The CJTF-76 Joint Planning Group developed the desired effects during the election security planning process conducted in the summer of 2005. The CJTF-76 JFEC hosted an air support planning conference at Bagram in July to develop the air support tasks that would achieve the effects. Air planners from the Air Component Coordination Element and the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC) at Bagram; the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar; and the 19th Battlefield Coordination Detachment (BCD), also based at Al Udeid, took part in the conference. The attendees agreed on the tasks and to use show-of-presence missions again to help achieve the desired effects.

However, there was debate about how CJTF-76 should define its additional election air support needs to the Combined Force Air Component Commander (CFACC). What would be required: an "air surge"[2] period, "steady state plus"[3] air support or both? How many more hours of air support per 24-hour air tasking order (ATO) would be required?

National Assembly and Provincial Council Election Air Support Plan. As a result of the conference debate, CJTF-76 requested eight more hours of dedicated air support per ATO to conduct show-of-presence missions across the combined joint operations area (CJOA). The attendees based this decision on the

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Desired Effects

- Anti-coalition militia are prevented from influencing the Afghan people.
- Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) can meet their election security requirements.
- Election workers maintain freedom of movement.
- Afghan people turn-out to vote.

Air Support Tasks

- Provide close air support (CAS) for regional command/task force operations.
- Provide shows-of-presence near key election nodes, population centers and ground lines-of-communications (LOCs).
- Provide CAS for Coalition Forces embedded with ANSF.
- Provide electronic warfare (EW) support along the LOCs.

Figure 1: Desired Effects and Air Supporting Tasks of the Combined Joint Task Force 76's (CJTF-76's) Missions for the September 2005 Election in Afghanistan

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25th ID's experience and CAOC lessons learned from the prior year's presidential election.

The next step was to define when and where to use the show-of-presence missions for the best results. The air planners viewed these elections as a long-term process that began in August 2005 with the candidates' campaigns and ended in December 2005 with the national assembly seating in the capital city of Kabul. Knowing it would be neither necessary nor possible to increase air support beyond normal levels for the entire five-month period, the planners requested the increases during four critical periods of the election. These were times of increased vulnerability for either the candidates or the electorate or periods of possible increased anti-coalition militia activity against the elections. (See Figure 2 on Page 30 for the four election air presence periods.)

The first critical period was the opening week of the campaign season in late August 2005. The second occurred during the week before election day, 18 September. The third period was during the post-election ballot collection and counting period in late September and early October, and the final critical period occurred in mid to late October, when

the Afghan government announced the election results.[4]

For each ATO during these periods, the CJTF-76 JFEC submitted four operational-level air support requests (ASRs) asking for two hours of show-of-presence support per ASR. To simplify planning and execution, the CJTF-76 JFEC decided to treat election day and the seating of the national assembly as separate one-day events. Air support was planned separately for these days and more closely resembled a true air surge.

With the question of when air support would be requested to achieve desired effects answered, the question of where the show-of-presence flights should be focused was the next planning step.

The JFEC and ASOC selected the focus areas for the show-of-presence missions during the critical periods by coordinating with several staff sections in CJTF-76 and with the subordinate regional commands and TFs. The core air planners, intelligence production section (IPS), joint improvised explosive device (IED) defeat TF, political advisor, civil-military operations (CMO) cell and information operations (IO) cell all had input on selecting and prioritizing air presence locations. A key step was to ensure that the show-of-presence missions did not interfere with achieving the desired effects in other ongoing operations.

The planners initially started with the show-of-presence focus areas used for the 2004 presidential election. Some areas formerly chosen by 25th ID air planners were more permissive in 2005 than in 2004 and did not warrant air presence to achieve the desired effects. Other areas still were contentious and, again, would need air presence.

The focus areas selected included large population centers, such as the cities of Kabul and Kandahar, as well as less-populated provincial areas where the Coalition presence was not as clear to the average Afghan. Finally, areas with medium to high anti-coalition militia activities or major ground lines of communications (LOCs), such as the Ring Road that connects the major cities, were selected.

To maximize the show-of-presence missions' effects over the selected locations, CJTF-76 grouped focus areas, enabling the CAOC to translate them into detailed flight routes and specific flight patterns. Air planners used terrain analysis to help choose the best

A voter from the village of Moraqhja proudly displays his ink-marked finger, showing that he voted in the first parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, 18 September 2005.

and most effective routes, given the extreme terrain.

The CAOC planned the flights to ensure the aircraft would be seen and (or) heard at random times throughout the critical periods. The random pattern and times of flight ensured the anti-coalition militia would not know when or where the presence flights would occur. The increased and unpredictable air presence allowed CJTF-76 to send the message that the Coalition could project power into anti-coalition militia staging areas as well as provide security for the election process.

With the election security air support plan complete, the JFEC outlined CJTF-76's air support requirements for the CJTF-76 commander. The outline included the air support concept, close air support (CAS) requirements and air planning guidance. Upon approval, the outline was translated into a memorandum from the CJTF-76 commander to the CFACC, requesting air component support for the operation. The memorandum was CJTF-76's input to the CFACC's air

operations directive regularly published to provide guidance to air component forces.

Did show-of-presence aircraft work? To assess the success of using aircraft in the air presence role, CJTF-76 found little objective data. While the JFEC wanted to make a definitive and objective assessment, the resources for broad-based data collection were not readily available. To definitively assess the effects of air power in this role calls for substantial information about the psychological impact on both the enemy and friendly populations of Afghanistan, a goal almost impossible to attain. Therefore, to assess the effectiveness of air presence missions in election security, CJTF-76 considered both the objective and subjective information available.

The objective data showed that enemy activity spiked near election time in the months of September and October 2005. Using only measures of effectiveness (MOEs), such as IED events or enemy indirect fire attacks, led to the conclu-

sion that CJTF-76 and the increased air presence did not prevent the anti-coalition militia from influencing the Afghan people, one of CJTF-76's desired election effects. However, the increased enemy activity mostly targeted Coalition Forces, and CJTF-76's ground forces significantly increased their offensive operations during this time.

Without more objective data, the JFEC considered the subjective assessments of US ground commanders and the effectiveness of anti-coalition militia attacks on the election process. The information ground commanders provided showed mixed conclusions. The responses varied between commanders' thinking that air presence missions had significant positive effects on the friendly population to commanders' believing that the air presence had little or no effect on election security. Commanders did agree that the large number of aircraft supporting the election positioned the aircraft to provide almost immediate CAS if anti-coalition militia engaged their troops—a definite advantage.

The inability of anti-coalition militia attacks to thwart the election gives a more positive indication that the use of air presence was beneficial. Reviewing CJTF-76's desired election outcomes shows that the anti-coalition militia did not greatly influence the Afghan people: the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) met all of their election security requirements, election workers did not lose their freedom of movement and the Afghan people turned out to vote. While enemy attacks did increase during the election period, the anti-coalition militia was unsuccessful in disrupting the election and the Afghan government successfully garnered enough voter turn-out to verify that the elections were legitimate.

Campaigning	National Assembly and Provincial Council	Ballot Collection & Counting		Election Results Released	Seating of National Assembly

E-Day

17 Aug   15 Sep   18 Sep   20 Sep   27 Sep   21 Oct   24 Oct   19 Dec

Air Presence   Air Presence   Air Presence   Air Presence*

*The final air presence period was cancelled because the Afghan officials released the results over several weeks to diffuse public protests.
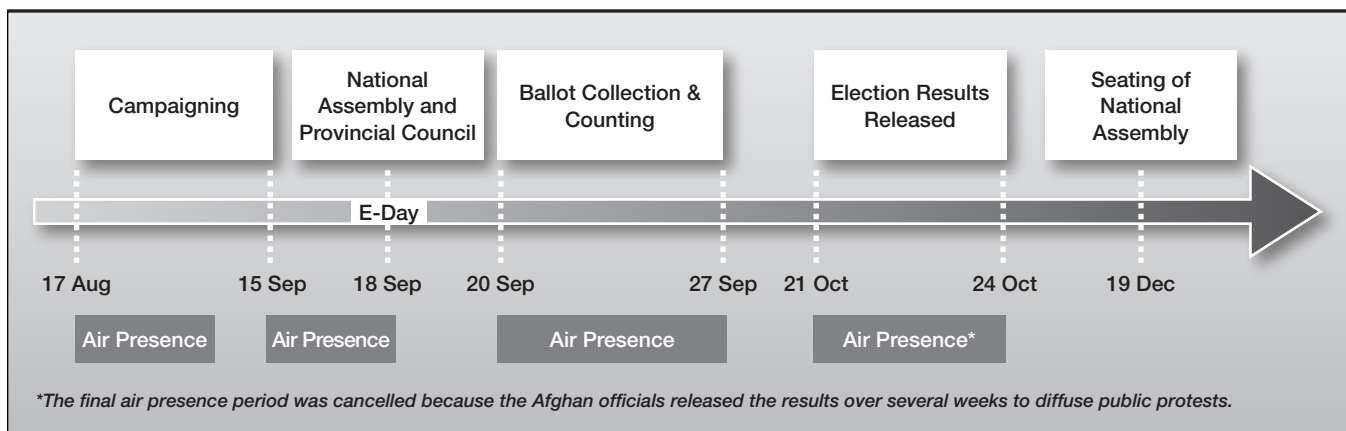
Figure 2: National Assembly and Provincial Council Election Time Line and Air Presence Missions, August to December 2005

These results suggest that air presence missions were effective.

However, there are other possible factors that could have played a role in achieving security during the election. Foremost among these factors are local conditions. The local leaders' good governance, local religious leaders' support for the election and the ANSF's positive actions in the provinces and districts are identified by some as the greatest contributors to election security.

With the lack of objective data and only partly conclusive subjective data, assessing whether or not air presence works in an election security plan must be left to the ground and air components' senior leadership. This is an example of the inconclusiveness of the science of war and where the art of war must be relied upon to gain the correct conclusion. Given the fact that CJTF-76 had access to aircraft to use in the air presence role, it was wise to employ this support to influence the national assembly and provincial council election favorably.

Looking at the election from a broader perspective and using the two successful Afghan elections during 2004 and 2005 as data points, the conclusion is that CJTF-76 successfully achieved its goal of preventing the anti-coalition militia from disrupting the Afghan election and aircraft in the presence role contributed to this success.

Recommendations for Air Presence in Future Elections. Each operation has its unique set of parameters that must be assessed before and during planning and execution and then after operations have ended. Given this set of conditions, we cannot predict whether or not aircraft flying in the presence role would significantly affect a given operation or election in the future.

However, the questions in Figure 3 may lead planners of future operations to assess whether or not aircraft in a presence mission would help achieve their desired results. The mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, time available and civil considerations (METT-TC) planning factors frame the questions.

Certainly, there have been times and places where aircraft performing the air presence mission significantly and positively helped to achieve the desired operational effects. There likely will be times in the future when they, again, will help obtain the desired operational effects. The challenge is to correctly gauge when to use this responsive, flexible and powerful tool.

• What is the mission? Can aircraft used in air presence roles support mission completion? Will their use in this role contribute more than if they were used in other roles?

• What effects will aircraft in the show-of-presence role have on the enemy? How does the enemy react when aircraft are in the vicinity? Do aircraft provoke the enemy to take action against Coalition Forces or the population?

• What is the threat to the aircraft involved? How would the loss of an aircraft in this role affect the situation? Is the risk of flying aircraft in the show-of-presence mission worth the anticipated gain?

• How will pulling aircraft away from other missions (e.g., CAS) affect support to friendly actions? Will friendly ground forces have access to air support, if needed? Can the air component command increase its sortie generation to meet expected needs and at what cost?

• What are the best times to use air presence missions during the operation or election time line? What are the best times of the day or night to fly air presence missions?

• How does the friendly population feel about seeing and hearing coalition aircraft? Will air presence increase the likelihood of the population's behaving as desired during the operations or election? Can the success of the desired effects be measured?

Figure 3: Questions to Assess Whether or Not Air Presence Missions Will Achieve Desired Effects

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